



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES

# Public Health Preparedness and Response UPDATE

Keeping You Informed

August 2004

## Area Bioterrorism Response Plans Tested at State Health Laboratory

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services' (DHSS) Public Health Laboratory, Cole County, and Jefferson City recently conducted a joint emergency response exercise. The joint exercise was held at the State Public Health Laboratory and included numerous emergency response agencies in the Jefferson City and Cole County area. The

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exercise tested unified command, communications, and overall coordination with public health, public safety, and an area hospital. The exercise assessed the State Laboratory's capacity to respond to a bioterrorism event and included a simulated decontamination drill by local emergency response teams and medical evaluations and treatment by hospital staff.

"This exercise is an important part of our state and local emergency response preparedness efforts," said Larry Evert, assistant director of the State Public Health Laboratory. "We have procedures in place for emergencies but this exercise gave us hands-on experience and helped us refine those plans."

The State Laboratory will play a vital behind-the-scenes role during a bioterrorist event or public health emergency by providing rapid testing of biological and chemical agents. Having plans in place and the capacity to perform these tests quickly will better protect the public's health and save more lives during such an event.

The following agencies participated in the exercise: DHSS State Public Health Laboratory; Cole County Emergency Response Team; Cole County/Jefferson City Emergency Management; Cole County Local

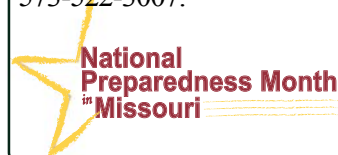
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## National Preparedness Month *September 2004*

Stop by the State Capitol grounds on September 9 for special exhibits and activities that mark the official launch of National Preparedness Month.

Visit the exhibits from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Learn about volunteering opportunities and find out how you, your family, and your community can be better prepared for emergencies. Displays include state agencies, Citizens Corps, volunteer agencies, and other emergency preparedness partners. The Governor's opening remarks and news conference begin at 11 a.m.

For more information, contact the Missouri Office of Homeland Security at 573-522-3007.



# Jefferson County's

## 3 "Cs" for Community Partnerships & Planning Success

*This is the first in a series of articles highlighting local public health agencies.*

As the nation focuses on the threat of terrorism, local public health agencies in Missouri are working in their communities to plan and prepare for disease outbreaks, natural disasters, and man-made attacks. The Jefferson County Health Department is no exception; much of their focus is on how to most effectively respond to an incident of any kind.

"Jefferson County is taking the all-hazards approach to disaster response and planning. No matter what type of incident or disaster, the same management strategy applies," said Dick Tufts, Regional Bioterrorism and Emergency Response Planner.

The Jefferson County Health Department is a strong partner in the county emergency response community as marked by the active participation by Health Department employees involved in the Hazardous Materials Response Team, Sheriff's Department, County Emergency Management, and the Local Emergency Planning Committee. All Health Department employees have received training up to the operations level in hazardous materials response and 13 are trained to the technician level.

"Local public health agency responsibilities have changed since 9-11, efforts are spreading from immunizations to disaster planning across Jefferson County. Our goal is to create a Super-Response Team with the Health Department's employees and become a full-scale partner in the established response community and Incident Management Structure," said Dennis Diehl, Director, Jefferson County Health Department.

Disaster resources are tested throughout Jefferson County on a regular basis. Recently, a tornado struck DeSoto, Missouri, knocking out power and water supplies for nearly two weeks. The County Health Department participated in the Incident Management System, interfaced with Incident Command and provided an emergency response four-wheel drive vehicle capable of gaining access to remote areas that were inaccessible to regular emergency vehicles due to trees and debris blocking many of the area's roadways. The environmental section of the Health Department responded to the disaster, addressing water availability and safety issues as well as food storage, preparation, and handling issues. In a recent unrelated incident, a landfill spontaneously combusted, which caused the surrounding area to be exposed to various chemical by-products. Again, the Health Department maintained a presence within the Incident Command Structure, providing analysis of the chemical constituents in the smoke and notifying the public in the surrounding affected areas of any potential health and safety risks due to



*From left to right, Dick Tufts, Regional Bioterrorism and Emergency Response Planner; Dennis Diehl, Jefferson County Health Department Director; Judy Tufts, Regional Bioterrorism Trainer & Volunteer Coordinator; and Bridgette Collins, Epidemiology Specialist.*

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Emergency Planning Committee; Capital Region Emergency Medical Services; Capital Region Medical Center; Jefferson City Police and Fire Departments; Capitol Police; State Facilities Management; Capital Area Red Cross Community Emergency Response Team Volunteers; and St. Louis University's Heartland Center for Public Health Preparedness.

### *In the next issue:*

- *Chemicals Testing at the State Health Laboratory*
- *Strategic National Stockpile Exercise in SE Missouri*

*and others...*

(Jefferson County continued from page 2)

exposure and assisted in the evacuation of some area residents. In the spring of 2005, the Health Department is planning a major multi-jurisdictional exercise that will involve the US Army, local and state response agencies, and hospitals in a mass casualty event. Each event helps the community address the dynamics that must be present to ensure collaborative efforts are in place to best prepare the county for the next incident.

“Looking at the big picture on the outside – focusing on what needs to happen to get to the inside - - takes a coordinated effort. We are committed to making the Jefferson County Health Department a leader in planning and preparing for incidents of any kind,” added Tufts.

The County Health Department is part of the St. Louis Area Regional Response System (STARRS). STARRS is a component of the Homeland Security Urban Area Security Initiative that focuses on regionalizing response resources and capabilities. “An integral part of this process is training Health Department employees in bioterrorism and weapons of mass destruction incident response and developing an effective volunteer workforce,” said Judy Tufts, Regional Bioterrorism Trainer and Volunteer Coordinator. Tufts is responsible for identifying appropriate training for health employees in bio-terrorism and weapons of mass destruction response; developing an effective volunteer coordination program that focuses on the location of resources in Region C counties; and determining effective training initiatives designed to ensure that regional responses to incidents utilizes the talents and abilities of volunteers in the area.

“Cooperation, Communication, and Coordination are key to the Jefferson County Health Department’s success in working with our community to plan and prepare for disease outbreaks, natural disasters, and man-made attacks,” added Diehl.

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Our state and local public health mission is to protect the communities' health and the well-being of individuals of all ages by assuring the early detection and the rapid, coordinated response to all public health emergencies, both natural and deliberate.